

“Earth to Dave.” Brian rapped his knuckles lightly against Dave’s head. He snapped back into it. “This nice lady wants to know what kind of bagel you want”

It was so like Brian to call the woman at the counter a *nice lady*. At some point, he’d watched American Pie and thought Stifler was how people should be. Or maybe he was just always like that and the movie made him think it was acceptable. He called himself a *gentleman*, but not in the creepy Elliot Rodger way, or in anything resembling the real meaning of the word. I think he just thought it was funny how that word got a rise out of people.

Dave replied, “uhhh a cinnamon raisin...with uhh...butter...yea butter.” Even the *nice lady* knew Dave was high, Brian and I ordered normal bagel sandwiches and here was Dave ordering dessert. Brian paid for the bagels with his mom’s credit card and told us we could Venmo him later. His mom’s credit card and we Venmo him. That’s the type of guy he was.

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“He didn’t leave last night. Passed out right where he was sitting,” Brian spoke about Dave like he wasn’t there. This would happen sometimes. Like we would smoke and get high, but for Dave it was a different thing. He would smoke till he was catatonic.

He was also the first one in our friend group to start smoking. Dave’s older brother killed himself when we were freshmen, and that’s around when it started. A coping strategy. It wasn’t just the loss of his brother, his mom was never the same afterward. I don’t think I saw her out of the house after that; Dave said she barely left her room. The overall downer atmosphere was too much for his sister and she moved to California as soon as she could. He was all that was left.

Dave got quiet after that. Maybe it was the weed, maybe it was the pain, but he started riding his bike to school every day and doing really well in classes. His brother was some kind of wunderkind; maybe he thought if he was like that his mother would stop moping. He graduated valedictorian and she never did. Maybe that wasn’t enough?

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"I thought we were gonna have a party last night," I mentioned offhandedly. Brian's parties weren't the Met Gala, but it was usually more than just the three of us. I was hoping Ari was going to be there.

"Hoping Ari was gonna be there?" Oh God even when I say something so innocuous Brian knows what I'm thinking. "Nah, we found the Volcano and didn't really want to text anyone else after that."

"Understandable"

"I don't know if Dave slept. When I came downstairs he had the bag inflated on top of the machine." He ribbed Dave with his elbow while he said this.

"I slept," mumbled Dave. "It's called wake and bake." Dave and Brian both liked 2000s movies, stoner comedies, movies about high school and prom, getting laid. Something about it being a simpler time.

They were closer than I was with either of them. Dave would go to dark places and Brian couldn't be brought there. So it worked. Even though Brian was kind of an asshole, he was a good guy to have around. His dad was a trucker and he wasn't around much. This is one of the things we bonded over.

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They called our name and we sat down at a table with the bagels. In the morning the visit from the cops didn't really seem like much of a big deal, so I thought I'd tell the guys about it. Upon doing so, Brian immediately pointed out something I missed.

He asked, "What's your dad's name?" and I realized right away. While he went by Jonathan and I went by John, it sure made a lot more sense that the cops were looking for him when they wrote "John." Lazy cops didn't even write his full name. He was in town, and he was on Long Island for the meeting. It wasn't me!

"Hey McFly!" Brian mocked. It was clear he'd watched Back to the Future recently and now I see where he got the knuckle rapping too. "You know you gotta stop being such a pussy all the time." He put on a high pitched voice that was supposed to resemble mine, "Hi, my name is John, and I'm a pussy."